

# SHADES OF GRAY



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SPRING 2004



## Gray's Reef Day in Savannah: City Proclaimed January 16<sup>th</sup> as Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Day

A Mayoral Proclamation by the City of Savannah, GA recognized January 16 as Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Day in honor of the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the sanctuary's designation

The official Mayoral Proclamation, which was signed by then—Mayor Floyd Adams, is posted on the sanctuary's Web site at <http://graysreef.noaa.gov>. The proclamation recognized that Gray's Reef "holds a significant and unique place in the heart of Savannah" and that the sanctuary "is the only federally protected example of the marine environment between North Carolina and the Florida Keys." Savannah,

where the Gray's Reef Sanctuary's administrative offices are located, "enjoys economic, health and recreational benefits from its close proximity to the Atlantic Ocean" of which Gray's Reef is an important part.

"It is an honor to have the city recognize the value and benefit of NOAA's Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary through this proclamation," said Greg McFall, Gray's Reef Sanctuary's science coordinator. "We look forward to opportunities that further involve the community, through education and outreach efforts, as together we share the future of this national treasure."



## Three New Members Join Gray's Reef Advisory Council; New Chairman is Sport Diving Representative

Gray's Reef welcomed three new members to its advisory council in January—William Berson II, Daniel Gleason and Leslie Sautter.

Judy Wright, the sport diving representative to the council, was named Council chairman. Wright is the owner of Island Dive Center on St. Simons Island and has served on the Council for four years.

Berson, coastal policy analyst with The Georgia Conservancy, will serve as the Georgia conservation representative to the council for the next three years. He replaces Patty McIntosh, also of The Georgia Conservancy, in that role. McIntosh served four years on the council.

Gleason, a faculty member of Georgia Southern University's biology department, will serve as the living resources research representative to the council for the next three years. He replaces George Sedberry of the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources. Sedberry also served four years on the council, the two years as vice-chairman.

Sautter, director of Project Oceanica and associate professor of geology at the College of Charleston in South Carolina, will serve as the university education representative to the council for the next three years. Sautter replaces Matt Gilligan of Savannah State University's marine sciences program, in that role. Gilligan served four years on the council, the last two of them as chairman.

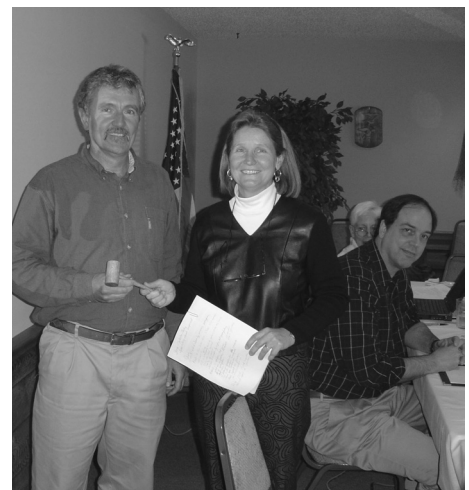
"We are excited to welcome the new Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council members, all of whom bring talent and expertise to the job," said GRNMS Manager Reed Bohne. "We also thank Matt Gilligan, George Sedberry and Patti McIntosh for their dedication and hard work over the past years."

The GRNMS Advisory Council was established in August 1999 to provide advice and recommendations on management and protection of the sanctuary. The council, through its members, also serves as liaison to the community regarding sanctuary issues and represents community interests, concerns and management needs to the sanctuary and NOAA.



## Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Hosted National Sanctuary Advisory Chairs Meeting

The National Marine Sanctuary Program (NMSP) held a meeting of the chairs of its 11 site-specific Sanctuary Advisory Councils February 23–26 in Savannah, Ga. The meeting was hosted by Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary and was open for public comment to obtain input from the Chairs on NMSP policy issues, reauthorization of the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA), and activities of cruise ships in sanctuaries. This year, for the second time, the Chairs were asked to provide advice to the national program leadership on policy topics important on a programmatic rather than a site-specific level.



Matt Gilligan passes gavel to new Advisory Council Chair Judy Wright.

Photo Credit: Gray's Reef

## SHADES OF GRAY

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We welcome comments and will consider publication of items submitted by readers as space permits.

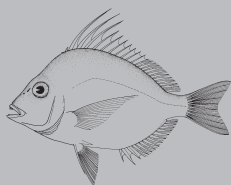
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## Questions & Answers: Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Draft Management Plan

**G**ray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary is completing reviews of its management plan. As part of the process, the Sanctuary Advisory Council was formed; each Council member represents an important element of the Sanctuary mission whether it is research, education, conservation, user groups, or representatives of partner agencies.

Once in place, the Advisory Council and Sanctuary staff considered the original list of GRNMS goals and objectives from the 1983 plan, and modified them to be consistent with the most recent reauthorization of the National Marine Sanctuary Act, as well as contemporary issues.

Eight public scoping meetings were held at which Sanctuary users, members of the public and agencies identified issues and problems they wanted GRNMS to address. During the comment period, approximately 1,800 people participated. They expressed concerns and provided recommendations in person and via fax, telephone and email. Seven more public hearings on the Draft Plan were held in November 2003. Sanctuary Staff are now compiling and reviewing the comments. A final management plan is expected to be released this summer.

Below are some basic questions and answers about the draft document.

### **1. What are the big changes in the Draft Management Plan?**

There are two important proposed changes—prohibiting anchoring in the sanctuary and revising regulations to allow fishing only with rod and reel and handline gear. The regulations would apply to all users of the sanctuary. However, most users conduct their activities in such a manner as to already be in compliance. The new proposed regulations are designed to support the sanctuary's conservation, protection and multiple-use goals.

### **2. If most people are already in compliance, why change?**

More and more people visit and use GRNMS every day. The trend toward increased use of the sanctuary is expected to

*Continued on page 4*

## From the Sanctuary Manager

By Reed Bohne, Sanctuary Manager

**S**hades of Gray, the title of this inaugural newsletter, of course refers to Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary. The sanctuary was so named to honor Milton "Sam" Gray of the University of Georgia Marine Institute. Sam studied the Gray's Reef area intensively in the 1960's and his extensive collection of invertebrate specimens is housed at the UGA Museum of Natural History.

Shades of Gray also is familiar to most in the context of an issue not being black or white, but a less certain shade of gray. Decisions in science, conservation and management of an open ocean environment like Gray's Reef are often tempered by great uncertainty. There is so much that is poorly understood about the ecology of the reef environment and the effect we all have on the health and vitality of this national undersea treasure. Our uncertainty is not and should not be an excuse for indecision. Rather it is one of many factors that must be part of the equation in our efforts to protect Gray's Reef and facilitate the use of its resources.

You are reading this newsletter and we hope you will join us in the effort to build community involvement in the management of Gray's Reef. Management decisions are often most successful when the community is part of the decision-making process and understands the uncertainty inherent in taking a particular path. We recently completed public hearings on our proposed management plan. The guidance provided by the participants in the review is shaping the approach to be taken in management of the sanctuary over the next five years. But, it is just a start.

If you've been involved, stay aboard. If you're new, join the party. We think the ingredients of the plan are going to keep you interested and excited in what we're doing. There just aren't too many cooks for this soup.



# STILL DISCOVERING: Science Leads the Way at Gray's Reef

When Gray's Reef was designated a National Marine Sanctuary on January 16, 1981 by President Jimmy Carter it became the nation's fourth marine sanctuary. The City of Savannah honored Gray's Reef when Mayor Floyd Adams proclaimed January 16, 2004 as Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary Day.

Gray's Reef, administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), is the only federally protected offshore natural area from North Carolina to the Florida Keys. While coastal Georgia has many lands set aside under local, state and federal protection, this is the only part of the marine environment that is so recognized. And, it is right off our coast, just 20 miles east of Sapelo Island.

For those in the community who enjoy recreational fishing and diving at Gray's Reef, the sanctuary needs no introduction. Teachers, too, know Gray's Reef as a living classroom for education and as a source of educational material and opportunities.

In the years since Gray's Reef was designated as a sanctuary, marine science and technology has explored new frontiers in ocean dynamics, ocean chemistry and the ocean ecosystems processes. We have only begun to wade along the ocean's edge in terms of science—there is much that is deeper that awaits discovery and understanding.

In our own ocean backyard, Gray's Reef has been part of the seachange of ocean science—we are learning more about this familiar place each day. The years since designation have brought a wealth of discovery including:

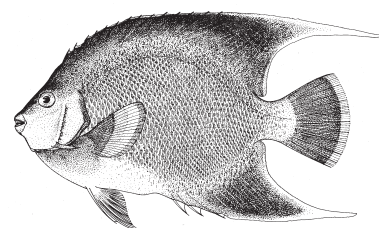
- ♦ Recent fossil finds of a man-made projectile point that has been dated to around 10,000 years old and a rib bone of a mastodon.
- ♦ Pollen samples from the substrate have been identified and indicate a forest of firs and spruces once covered the area.
- ♦ Ongoing and future studies by the University of Georgia and NOAA seek to determine if Gray's Reef was an actual paleo-Indian site.



This warty sea slug is just the latest creature to capture scientific interest at Gray's Reef

- ♦ While the flat sandy bottom within Gray's Reef appears to be a biological desert, these soft-bottom areas are teeming with hidden life. Up to 89 different species have been found in a single grab sample of sediment (a footprint about the size of a sheet of notebook paper) from these "lifeless" areas.
- ♦ An estimated 160 species of fish, encompassing a wide variety of sizes, forms, and ecological roles, have been recorded at Gray's Reef. Approximately 30 different species of fish spawn in the vicinity of the sanctuary.
- ♦ This year we photographed and videotaped a beautiful nudibranch at the reef. Nudibranchs "naked gills" are shell-less gastropod creatures often of beautiful colors that populate reefs around the world. We couldn't identify this creature in our field guide however and sent photos to experts in this science. They responded with great excitement because they had no known photos of this exquisite animal with the glorious name of *Dendrodoris warta* or Warty Sea Slug. The scientists immediately put it on their Slug of the Week website with all the attendant glory and fame such designation accords our great state.
- ♦ More than 30 species of marine birds occur off the southeastern coast of the United States, including albatross, shearwaters, petrels, storm petrels, tropicbirds, frigate birds, boobies, and gannets. Seabirds observed in the sanctuary area include petrels, shearwaters, gannets, phalaropes, jaegers, and terns.

Each year brings a new discovery and the scientific work done at Gray's Reef not only helps us better understand the marine environment; it helps us better understand our role in that environment and the ocean's impact on our dry land lives.



*Continued from page 4, Questions & Answers*

continue to rise due the rise in population along the coast with a corresponding increase in boat registration, the popularity of recreational fishing and improved boating and fish-finding technologies. Increased use, coupled with declines in fish populations, degradation of coastal habitats and advancements in scientific and educational technology require that sanctuary management plans be reviewed and revised appropriately to reflect current conditions. Amendments to the National Marine Sanctuaries Act over the past 30 years have strengthened the program's conservation principals-this Draft Management Plan brings GRNMS in better compliance with the national act and program.

### **3. Have the current rules for fishing changed at Gray's Reef?**

No, the Sanctuary regulations from 1981 still apply at Gray's Reef.

The sanctuary is open for fishing, diving and other uses such as education and scientific research that are compatible with the goals of the National Marine Sanctuary Program's mission of protecting and conserving the marine resources of the national marine sanctuary system now and in the future.

### **4. How will the change to an allowable gear rule affect how I fish?**

Most anglers will not be affected. Data indicates that the majority of sanctuary users are fishing with rod and reel and handline gear already.

The new proposed regulations would simplify the public's understanding of allowable gear in GRNMS and eliminate the need and cost of continued review of new fishing gear as it becomes available. The new proposed rule would also reduce the number of regulatory changes for users to adjust to over time.

However, one thing the proposed new rule does is to eliminate the use of some gear that is allowable, but seldom used now. All gear other than rod and reel and handline gear (such as net and mid-water trawls) must be stowed while in the sanctuary.

If the rule is adopted and approved by NOAA in the final plan, then commercial and recreational spearfishing would be prohibited. While the number of divers who spearfish in the Sanctuary is small, spearfishing targets the larger individual fish at the reef. These large fish are invaluable to the reproductive health of the species because they are capable of producing the most young. Spearfishing with powerheads is cur-

rently prohibited in the sanctuary.

### **5. How will the proposed no anchoring rule affect me?**

While most people visiting Gray's Reef do not anchor, aerial surveys over the past 19 years clearly indicate that some recreational users do anchor at GRNMS. The overall percentage of anchored users observed since 1983 is not definitive, but seems to be in the range of 20 to 33 percent. While these figures are not exact, the definite trend of overall increases in use is clear. Even if the number of anchoring users seems small in terms of percentage, it is clear that the actual numbers of boats anchored have increased significantly. Recent aerial and on-water surveys have also linked the location of anchored boats to the live bottom area.

### **6. What difference does anchoring make anyway?**

The live bottom habitat that attracts fish and recreational fishers and divers to Gray's Reef is delicate, slow growing and easily damaged. Even one dropped anchor or swaying anchor chain can destroy or dislodge an array of delicate and slow-growing flora and fauna and destroy the ledges they grow on forever.

During GRNMS's designation in 1981, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) concluded that anchoring was an issue of concern and therefore anchoring was included in the designation as an activity that could be regulated. During the scoping phase of this management plan review, participants noted that continued anchoring was a significant issue. Many participants suggested anchoring restrictions as a way of minimizing damage to ledge and live bottom habitat.

### **7. I've heard Gray's Reef will become a marine reserve and will be closed, is that true?**

No, this plan includes no proposal to close Gray's Reef.

During the initial scoping phase of the management plan review, a number of comments suggested that NOAA should consider designating an area within the sanctuary where some or all human uses would be restricted or prohibited including a no take reserve. After consideration of these comments, the sanctuary and the members of the Sanctuary Advisory Council decided that the marine reserve issue would be best considered through the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (SAFMC) marine protected area process. GRNMS was initially considered by the SAFMC for evaluation under their process. However, the SAFMC subsequently decided to focus on deep-water

habitat and further consideration of GRMNS was deferred to a future phase of analysis through the SAFMC process. GRNMS will work with the SAFMC at the appropriate time in their ongoing deliberations.

### **8. What about closing Gray's Reef so only scientists can use it?**

Some scientists have recommended that delineating even a small portion of the 11,000-acre sanctuary as a research area would be very useful to the scientific community and management as they try to learn about living resource populations and population changes. Without having an area of the naturally occurring live bottom devoted to research, it becomes very difficult to scientifically contrast community structure between untouched natural reefs and those that are used for fishing and diving. Throughout the scoping process, members of the public indicated a desire to have good science as at the basis for decisions made about GRNMS.

There are currently no natural live bottom areas in the South Atlantic Bight set aside for use as a scientific control area. Farther south, in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, four areas covering a combined total of 460 acres have been designated as special use areas for research only. These areas, which have been established for research purposes, have shown tremendous value as control areas to monitor a variety of parameters such as reef fish population and diversity.

After considering the comments of scientists and the public, the Sanctuary Advisory Council recommended that the sanctuary establish a working group to the advisory council on the development of the concept. The working group, and subsequently the advisory council, will consider establishment of a research area. If a decision were made to develop the concept, a separate public review process would be initiated. The review and assessment would be conducted as a supplemental environmental impact statement under the provision of the National Environmental Policy Act and National Marine Sanctuaries Act, which would be a separate and distinct process from the current management plan review. Such a process would include public participation along with the participation of the SAFMC and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

### **9. What's Next**

The comment period for the draft plan closed on January 1, 2004. NOAA is reviewing the information and recommendations provided and expects to issue an amended final plan in the summer of 2004.





## Student Ocean Council Members Explore the Marine Environment

The 20 members of this year's Student Ocean Council have spotted dolphins, explored an early submarine, critiqued the movie "Finding Nemo," snorkeled with manatees and they are just getting started. The students from Savannah area public and private schools are lead by Education Intern Leah Cooling, a Savannah State University junior who has joined the staff of NOAA's Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary as an Education Intern under a fellowship program that recognizes students in the marine sciences.

A native of Norcross, Ga., Ms. Cooling is studying marine science education at Savannah State.

## Gray's Reef Intern Michelle Duncan Turns Opportunity into Career

Michelle Duncan was Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary's first Education Intern under a fellowship program that promotes minority students in the marine sciences. Her enthusiasm, hard work and academic success set the standard for the interns that have followed.

The staff of Gray's Reef was on hand recently to applaud their one time intern as Michelle presented her masters thesis talk to an audience of marine biology majors at her undergraduate alma mater, Savannah State University.

It was a brief homecoming stop in Savannah for Michelle who was on her way to Panama City Florida to start her new job as a reef fish biologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). "It's all been just one wonderful opportunity after another," Michelle said.

Since June 2000, Savannah State University, one of Georgia's traditionally minority serving colleges, has identified one student annually to serve as the Gray's Reef Education Intern. Michelle was the first intern under that program.

*Continued on page 7*

## Judy Wright: The Environmental Ethics of Sport Diving Are Evolving for the Better

Judy Wright says she was "terrified," the first time she went diving. Now she is the owner of the wildly popular Island Dive Center, on St. Simons Island, Ga., and was recently appointed chairman of the Gray's Reef Sanctuary Advisory Council. Judy is serving her fourth year as the recreational diving representative on the Council.

From scared first time diver to PADI instructor, Judy has seen many changes in her own life. And she says she has seen changes in the environmental ethics of the diving community. Changes she likes and can take credit for bringing about.

Each year, she certifies about 75 new divers including some youngsters from a summer SCUBA camp. And each of those divers learns as much about protecting the marine environment as they do about diver safety. Judy emphasizes a "Take pictures, not pieces," philosophy when teaching SCUBA and when diving. But it wasn't always that way.

As a new diver, she once trapped a baby black sea bass in a restaurant-sized mayonnaise jar to take back for a friend's home salt-water aquarium. "I did it because I knew how to" she says. "Now, I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing and neither would most divers. We all know better."

She tells the story on herself to illustrate how aware the diving community has become of the need to protect the resource they use for recreation. "If every diver takes a

souvenir, there will not be anything left for the divers of the future," she says.

In 1996, Judy started Georgia's first organized Reef Sweep when she and a team of volunteer divers cleaned up in Gray's Reef NMS. Her efforts against marine debris and for diver environmental education won her a NOAA Environmental Hero award. Gray's Reef continues the Reef Sweep program-this year two separate recreational diving clubs conducted clean ups at Gray's Reef picking up everything from cans and fishing line to matchbook covers.

Recreational divers particularly enjoy diving in marine sanctuaries and other protected areas, Judy says, for a very simple reason: "That's where the marine life is, that's where you see the fish."

A passionate advocate for diving in Georgia waters, Judy dove Gray's Reef before it became a sanctuary in 1981. The Sanctuary designation really made a difference to her business, however, because more people are aware that Sanctuaries are homes to the nation's ocean treasures.

"If I tell people we are going diving at the Sapelo live bottom (the old local name for the area that is now Gray's Reef NMS) they don't get too excited. But when I tell them we are going to a national marine sanctuary, they really get excited," she says. "If it's a Sanctuary, it's special."



Members of the Student Ocean Council learn the basics of SCUBA diving. This is just one of the many ocean-related programs the high-school aged SOC members participate in.

## Live from the Live Bottom

**N**OAA's Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary hosted live local news broadcast from the bottom of the sea last summer with Michael Jordan, the former anchor of Savannah's NBC affiliate, WSAV-TV.

That evening, viewers of the 6 p.m. news were able to see Gray's Reef divers Greg McFall and Peter Fischel as they swam around a live bottom ledge pointing out vase sponges and oyster toadfish. They could hear as the divers talked with Sanctuary education coordinator Cathy Sakas and local news anchor Michael Jordan aboard the Skidaway Institute of Oceanography research vessel Savannah. At the 11 p.m. news, a recap of the live program was shown along with an upbeat four-minute feature about issues facing Gray's Reef that included underwater footage provided by Sanctuary staff.

"This type of coverage is exciting for the sanctuary and NOAA" according to Gray's Reef manager Reed Bohne. "WSAV's live underwater broadcast was riveting television and I believe a first of its kind."

Jordan made Gray's Reef the topic of several televised feature stories during the station's sweeps weeks programming. Sweeps weeks programming determines station viewership and standings in local media markets. Jordan said he chose Gray's Reef as a topic because even though it's right off the Georgia coast, it remains relatively unknown to many of the station's viewers. Even the folks who regularly fish in the Sanctuary do not always know what wonders lie under the waves. "Our



Local television audience members got a look beneath the waves at the Sanctuary during the first live broadcast from the bottom.

satellite live shot from Gray's Reef was one of the most challenging and exciting things I've ever been professionally involved in," Jordan said. He called Gray's Reef Georgia's underwater treasure.

Jordan joined 14 teachers who participated in the University of Georgia's Marine Education Center and Aquarium's COASTLINEs workshop as they collected and analyzed water column data from aboard the R/V Savannah. A separate feature on the teachers was part of the broadcast package. Gray's Reef provided an ROV for the teachers' work as a part of their day at sea. The ROV, deployed by Gray's Reef

intern Brian Gauger, also provided the key underwater link between WSAV's viewers and the sea floor.

The live broadcast used the same video-satellite phone technology employed for live shots from Iraq to feed real time video from the ROV on the sea floor to the station. WSAV committed hundreds of man-hours and thousands of dollars to the broadcast, which was risky from the start. Technical glitches and weather could have cancelled the broadcast at any time. Even at two minutes before 6 p.m., Jordan and the WSAV news crew were still fighting dropped connections and shaky power sources.

"There were serious financial and technical obstacles to overcome just to get the equipment to the reef and make all the parts interface," Jordan said. "It was also near-impossible to establish and maintain the satellite signal and keep communications open with the station."

But in the end, it all came together beautifully.

"It was so rewarding to bring the reef and its creatures to our viewers, and to share the excitement of the live shot with the teachers enjoying a science daytrip on the R/V Savannah," Jordan said

"This was truly a first for Savannah television news."





Continued from page 5, Gray's Reef Intern



Michelle Duncan has moved from a student internship at Gray's Reef to a career in NOAA.

The intern is responsible for managing the Student Ocean Council, a program for upper level high school students from local public and private schools who have a desire to learn more about ocean science related careers and subjects. The Education intern is also responsible for recruiting students to Ocean Council. The internship program is designed to give students like Michelle work experience and to introduce them to the workings of a government agency tasked with ocean resource management. By working in the office and participating in the various functions and meetings involved with the agency, the student interns receive a broad experience that may help serve as a bridge to future graduate work in the marine science field.

Michelle took the opportunity and ran with it.

"I always knew I wanted to pursue a career in the marine sciences but academics take you only so far. The NOAA staff at Gray's Reef convinced me that this career is not only intellectually stimulating but a lot of fun too. They made me instantly one of the team and I am so grateful for their encouragement and support."

Reed Bohne, Gray's Reef manager, noted that the intern program with Savannah State University has provided great support to the sanctuary program.

"We've had superb students from the SSU marine science program, bright and wonderful to work with. Of course, we take special pride in Michelle who was the first in our program and has gone on to distinguish herself with academic honors, a great work ethic, and enthusiasm that lights up the room."

After her stint at NOAA's Gray's Reef and after completing her undergrad work in marine biology at SSU, Michelle applied for a scholarship with NOAA's Education Partnership Program with Minority Serving Institutions. She was accepted as a graduate student in Clemson University's school of Aquaculture, Fisheries and Wildlife in August 2001. The NOAA scholarship paid for her tuition, books and housing allowing Michelle to concentrate on her work study-

ing the spawning activity of endangered Shortnosed sturgeon in South Carolina's Cooper River under the guidance of professor Jeff Isley.

For her thesis, Michelle looked at how water flow, temperature and velocity at the Pinopolis Dam impacted sturgeon spawning activity. Michelle collected the first larval Shortnosed sturgeon ever taken from the Cooper River during her research.

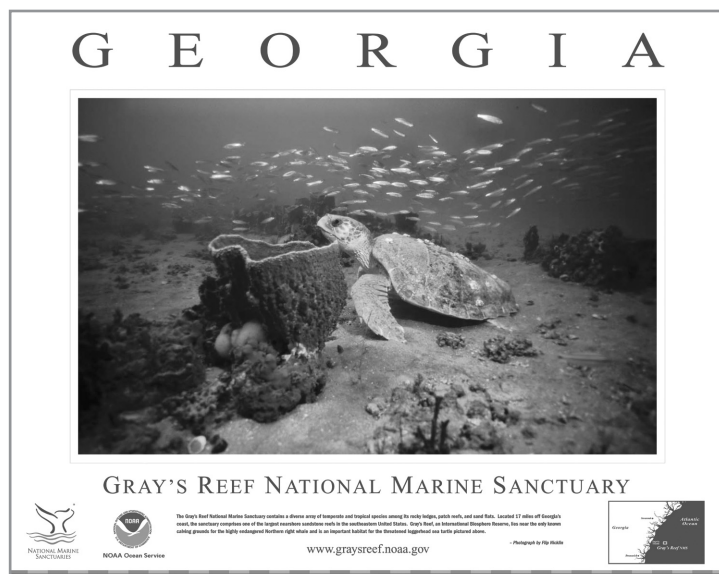
Michelle is from Newnan, Georgia, and grew up with a love for manatees. When it came time to select an undergraduate program, she knew she wanted to do something with oceans and knew she wanted to stay in Georgia for college.

With those criteria, Michelle enrolled at Savannah State University where she excelled in the marine sciences program, said Dr. Dionne Hoskins, one of her instructors. Hoskins and department head Dr. Matt Gilligan, a Gray's Reef Sanctuary Advisory Council member, encouraged Michelle to apply for the Gray's Reef internship.

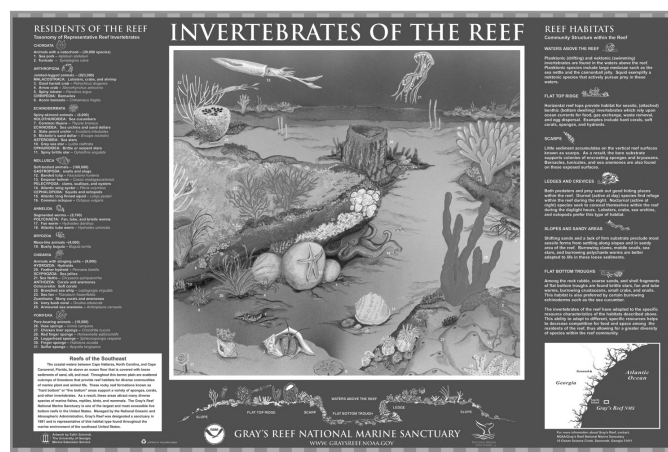
The NOAA Education Partnership Program with Minority Serving Institutions scholarship came with a commitment to work for the agency—one year's worth of scholarship equals three years worth of work. Michelle said she is looking forward to her six-year commitment to the NOAA Fisheries unit in Panama City. She's even purchased a house "five minutes from the water."



## Two Favorite Posters Get Updated Look



Two favorite Gray's Reef posters have gotten a makeover. The "Invertebrates of the Reef" poster hangs in many classrooms but has been out of print for a long time. It's back, with new taxonomy information on a couple of sanctuary residents. The "Georgia" poster has been revised to show one of the charismatic species of the sanctuary—the threatened loggerhead sea turtle.



NOAA's Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary

## SHADES OF GRAY

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## About Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary

**N**OAA's Gray's Reef National Marine Sanctuary was established in 1981 to protect one of the largest nearshore live-bottom reefs of the southeastern United States. The Sanctuary is located about 17 miles off Sapelo Island, Georgia and encompasses 17 square nautical miles.

An estimated 160 species of fish have been recorded at Gray's reef; approximately 30 species spawn there. The ledges and overhangs of the reef serve as resting and foraging area for the loggerhead sea turtle, a (threatened species) which nest on nearby barrier islands. The Sanctuary is near the critical habitat and only known calving ground for the highly endangered Northern right whales. Pelagic sea birds and shore birds feed on schooling baitfish within Sanctuary waters. The Sanctuary is well known to the recreational divers and fishers who visit it.

The mission of the National Marine Sanctuaries Program is to serve as the trustee for the nation's system of marine protected areas to conserve, protect and enhance their bio diversity, ecological integrity and cultural legacy.

For more information,  
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